ADVERTISEMENT

Forget your arms, your legs, regress!
Deploy your stomach to dissolve your food—
one is free to do as one chooses
when ones' body is succulent and translucent. Myself,
I'm tired of hang-ups, like this fear of legs,
or lack of legs. I dare myself to love
the resourceful centipede, the industry of silverfish,
and grace of worms!

O! To be segmented
and washed up by storms, or to live
in moist places far from human vanity!—
to mimic the manner in which certain spiders
build their webs beneath water, snatching
bulbs of air, dragging them down
beneath lilies to make their traps habitable—

too many things: the delicate, rice paper wings
of the cave cricket (most terrifying of bugs,
in part because of their spastic hop)
or travel home again, alone, having borrowed love,
having worn its customs, afraid to budge, or
speak—

having seen how any word or gesture
could send a friend away—how soft the edges
of a drunk man's eyes are, lips perfumed
with fragrances of herbal character—
soft and filmed against
the nuances of feeling, or memory,
the body of meaning from which we build love.

Here, my hands are empty,
like my feet when I recline to sleep. First,
the arm, the elbow, forearm, fingers, knuckle,
nail—
my usefulness. How far we've come! And how close
I am to single cells darting in the tepid seas—
that blanche from touch, that cramp, that
crease
along their centers, tear, and cannot swim
fast enough away from the fragments of themselves.

SPECIAL MOMENTS

I eat what I kill.
Most of what I've killed
lived in my face.

So many days
under the sun
sucks out surprise.

The shelter
of these tiny checks
keeps us alert.

We're never told
when all plates
will be licked clean,

shiny under a slow
but perpetual
rain of dust,

little specks
the horrid universe
drops off

mingled
with brushed off
flakes of us.

THE FUZZY PONY

Tired of face, I'll give you face—
makes what?—the eyelids and the mouth
shrinking back around their teeth

a new event, a mythic holiday.
What's me? White handed shoe-black
buffing the leather

holding the rich feet
of your grandfathers
together. Still,

sprinkle nickels
on the vegetable dead.
By nature--? If it weren't

for angels coming through
the bodies of lawyers, static holding
back the angry louts in them,

I would be free beneath the trees,
rolling shirts stolen from lines
to squeeze the water out,

tapping my teeth on the empty bottles
until they break and a laugh cracked free.
Hound, harried hound,

leave my voiceless carcass there.

PANDAS & RAINBOWS

The pandas paw at arachnids
on thick leaves
beneath the dim rainbow.

The pandas are unused
to the power they have over America,
breathless at their genitals

so sadly unproductive.
They are frightened
that these fast-paced hillbillies

will become bored with them.
There is a lot of hushed grunting
between them, phrases like

“Cuter!” and “Look busy! Sniff something!”
shiver to me through the gingkoes
shedding their shit fruit

around the frustrated pandas
under the dim rainbow.
They think I am one of them,

in disguise, hiding my wet nose
behind this blue sno-cone. I know
this is so: they are spelling

messages to this effect
on the bottom of a yellow, upturned
bucket a Mountie has heaved

over the wall. “Go home, Canuck!”
I think as my teeth wince. The pandas
are writing with the snapped-off legs

of the spiders, a word at a time,
then swiping them off.
It takes them a long while

to gather the segments again.
Nannies are holding
back the eyes of their charges.

The pandas write: FUCK. RAINBOWS.
GIVE. US. MONEY.
AMERICAN. DOLLARS.

BALD TATIANA & THE CUNNING VEAL

For instance, Tatiana, daughter of the banker and her beaux, the rakish Ned
of Tubesburg of the Harlan Tubes of Tubesburg, and his mother, Maitia Plum.
As lore would have it, both born in balloons during the county fair,
on the last and first day, 1969, respectively. Of course, Ned's parents were devoured
by crabs (the necessities of fictional orphanhood being obvious) and much of how
he has challenged his educators in the years since has bloomed from this event. Tatiana
understands. Makes allowances. It isn't always easy on our friend. During Ned's

infamous confrontation with the nylon lobster (close enough) mascot
of the Tubesburg Claws, Tatiana's beautiful red hair fell out in clumps
all about her dainty feet. She didn't mind—so much for combs! So much for Ned,
picking antennae from his knuckles in the squad car, missing the jujubes, the junior mints,
black jellybeans (lustrous, beautiful, but reeking of the icky licorice of ouzo anise)
already picked out from the rest by Tatiana in the queue, all scrambled for by pigeons
and the shameless offspring of the jaialai fans. It isn't often now that Ned

gives out. Tatiana, eschewing wigs, is seldom out of sight, rarely photographed
because of the undermining glare of Tatiana's head. Paparazzi! Curse that bulbous gleam!
Pzz-dah! they cry, exclaiming at the moon, her closest kin, shaking curls of wasted film
from their sweaty hands. At first, her friends really thought she might need
a break from Ned. All that curly belly but no class! But 700, 000 people held her
in their bosoms, devoted as she was to the crustacean hating fiend seen on every TV screen

in Tubesburg and environs. She thought, "Am I in love just because some bozo

bit my nipples on the bus?" The glory could not last. Smell the butts of
bees when they slip into buds, they know! (Ever drink a coke out of a can
and swallow one of those?)
You know. You know then how the story goes. Go this far with me: I'm
talking meat.
I'd rather not go too far into that, but take my word. In fact, touch the
brown
and shiny surface of my skin and note my grammar—nearly flawless. Any
questions?
No. So follow. Sitting on my Styrofoam tray under cover of wax paper I
leaped into the air,

feeling truly alive. How long have I been imprisoned on the spareribs of
some piggy?
Or moocaptive. I'm not even sure, the sound was so muffled: moos, oinks,
bleats of goats
all bounced around me, always! Free! Free! Now—let someone eat me?
I think not! No way! Change me! Change me? Bite me! Let go! I am hard
on myself,
on the lips of my mistress, the bald Tatiana. I make her a deal. We
whisper
near the ice cubes, conspiring. Shivering. She nods. I jiggle. She slips my
cold body into
the cottony hell of her stocking, but only for now! I know someone is
following. I know

we must rush, rush away into the night. She speaks of the sunset—the
colors!
The airplanes. She relates me the streets. I weep out of joy, out of
mortification
as she reaches down, "scratching" assuredly. O alright, Diva, devour me
now—
my aching body with a greasy sauce. I cannot bear existence and
suddenly asleep—

BIG DOINGS FOR THE WEE ONE

To some creatures, logs are delicious.
It is morning. The caterpillars smell my business.

A wolf without its eyes crept down the hill.
Chipmunks on their hind legs mocked him

from their mounds of compost. Laughing birds
swept over him, dropping garter snakes

onto his back. His old spine snapped.
The hunters snatched dumb beavers from their traps.

I wish that I was a little scrap of veal
with suicidal tendencies and callused feet!

Then I would scoot up to wolf and let him feed
upon the morsel of my body. I am what he needs.

What Otah, the blind wolf, god of fancies, needs.
Like chewing gum, I'd sit inside for seven years.

Here he comes, nagging at the woodpecker of defeat!

TINY VILLAGE OF YOUR DREAMS

There is smoke, someplace,
making a child's understanding

of sky
a murky thing.

When I was small,
I knew so many things:

that the bigger people got
the more that they believed

they knew…
but they could not prove it;

that houses are like planets,
different sparks of colored light and unknowable history

inside them.
And one other thing: that no matter how tired I was

someone could complain
that my elbows had been lax,

and when the work was done
I could not be shuttled

quickly enough into sleep.
Was I like you, staring up,

my pillow an amplifier
of marching and argument,

determined I would learn to rest
with my eyes opened?

Help me through this, won't you, help.
Just seeing you stand still

as I reach toward you is something.

THE FINICKY OTTER

I know you so well, little creature,
so anxious that your whiskers are flecked with bits of mussel,

so angry in the water, thinking about chewing gum
and politics, until you cannot sleep, chatter frenzied

around the green ankles of the happy general on his horse.
There is no love in you, not now, not anymore.

The morning flowers open by the riverbed and laugh,
the lioness shrinks back from the patter of the tarantula.

The moon, itself incapable of change, has no answer for you,
and you know but won't admit you had no paw

in dawn's creation. The old man's face is streaked with acid,
and his hands, muscled as they ever were, are losing grip

through faulty soldering. You hate him, who has never
spoken a word to you. When you sleep, you sigh

to see his hooves begin to sink into the silt.
Much of what led you to crack open Mr. Adkins

is in the ledger, and also how
the angry spirits of gross seals roll off the water.

THE SECOND COMING

I am careful near the King's Cake,
my teeth are sore enough
without biting down on Jesus,

the little plastic Messiah

would piously but absently
lodge in my windpipe

and what could I do?
Spit him out? Chew discreetly
and “wipe my mouth”

with a red paper napkin?

SEASIDE CHAT

The sea, as you understood it, washed in
studded with thousands of pink beans.
The waves were like the innards of a god,
smooth as glass and active as a mind

but without disruptions of any kind.
And nothing scattered down to feed,
and you knew, but didn't want to know
that those dots were fragments of a cooler,

the Styrofoam a little boy might break
apart to see what holds its form.
I can't handle beach. If it were true,
my god, what would be left

of me beneath those towels, trowels,
dogs? The sea is not my friend:
I wish that I could wash
away this thought, how each fish

rises up with manuscripts
clenched in its mouth: the masterpieces
of the favored authors of my youth:
Zilpha Keatley Snyder, and Xaviera

Hollander. The sea, like childhood,
when content really mattered…
but there's the sea, the ocean,
what I love: a dead man crowned with apricots.

SHINY SHOVELS

They have been burying dogs most of the hour.
Someplace, a man holds his wristwatch
like a snake he has found,

run over by a bicycle, flattened,
the mouse in its belly flattened,
and its spine, blackened in hot sun
in its mixed blood, bending
slowly as the marrow dries,

and his tears were lifting off
from his eyelashes. He has entered
the clearing, where the trees
before him have love handles
of denim and bright cottons,
and he is crying because
he has realized whatever he is hiding
behind the trees aren't as sad

as the dogs were, watching
their masters burning their clothes,
throwing even the dishes which he had eaten from
into the flames, the knick-knacks, the tuba.
Too many people had been
living there anyway,
exposed, as dog owners,
to be trusted and playful.
Of course, they let him in,
but no one was certain
what he had touched.

PINE CONE OWLS WITH ACORN EYES

We grew up believing that we were justifiably bored.

Being so little and always hungry,
and the things being made
were of their very nature boring,
making us bored
even if we only breathed
some part of the air
that got bored while blowing over it
and only luckily
flew off to find us.

Now, we are older,
and the truth is pressed on us,
insistently. Everything is fascinating,
as it has always been.
It is ourselves that are at fault:
either we are flawed in our interest:
there are pills for this,
or we believe too many things
are interesting,
and they come to us,
like cats to milk,
and bat balls of twine
around us with no certain pattern.
We are happy piling into big buildings
like bacteria,
and happier still
working without recompense.

HAPPY MEMORY

I didn’t know as I watched them

how grateful I would be today

for the sound of the boiling.
That is what I am interested in now:

people cracking thorax open
over their plastic cups of beer,

laughing and drowsy as the sun
slips into the pines,

and the bald cobs pile
on the plates with orange shards.

The smiles of fishermen drop
into the water and scoot along the bottom,

flirting with lobsters. It is dangerous
and fun to have your bones on the outside,

like buildings. The view is always good,
because it is usually food or something aromatic

ready to mate with us. The sound I remember
is like whispering, like callused hands

as a child’s soft fingers slip from them, and really,
the air is filled with cracking, snapping, chewing,

and the fragments have teeth.

It sounds like that. It does. The cricket creeping.
A bird may make a wish, without the words to ask,

but crickets, having the wings of luck themselves, beg
without shame at the genius of the dark. Old men

who cannot sleep, old men whose fiddles
had lain silent so long against their laps

that they fell inside, are who they are.
The itch of these above their knees nags and hums.

They have to scratch, and scratching at the buried strings
pulls forth the cry, the pitch that maddens them

eternally, and sends them out, hopping
from their homes into drenched crabgrass

and the thistles, the heads of which stare back
dumbly at their tiny heads like sharp reflections.

I don’t know why the dust is in the glue.
I thought the glue was very fresh.
I know that the horse is unhappy in your barn.
Mysteriously, he should be grateful there is paste.

I lived once in a house made out of rice.
You know, salt in the water makes a happy home.
My mind is very fragile glad I have a head.
I love your mother. She should be a vitamin.

Mud is something else. It’s made of dirt!
It’s not a good idea to put your puppy there.
Montgomery is the best at what I do,
but Montgomery can’t even find my keys.

LESSONS FOR SPARKLY LEPRECHAUNS

Dressed in green, their mother makes them come.
The light-bulb’s glare lay on the circle at the center

of the meniscus of the glass, the moon a glacial lake.
The teacher, black and blind, brushes the strings

and his fingertips still tear from learning. The boys
are delinquent, but fall into place

and hum back their lessons. He plays them
the apple abstraction, the still-life, the nude life-study

and journeyman mimicry, then leans back laughing
and the strings chime about him like night dogs

peep and whistle with their long bones spreading
and he climbs up their voices to rattle the dark.

MORE FUN FOR MIKEY

How did you hurt me? I listened for the snow.
It had lain there, waiting with the county underneath it…

whatever rabbits had been caught in the talons of the crows
had been dropped, just as the snow began.

I thought of that boy, who you almost never saw,
once or twice ducking into his house, removing his blue cap,

stopping at the screen, as if the wire held back
some illumination, unadulterated, inside. Perhaps

he was smoking a nasty little doobie,
hiding behind bushes, waiting for the bus.

Maybe he was snatching at the paw of a rabbit,
not because the crow had lost its meal

or that the boy cringed beneath his love of bunnies,
but because he could not stand ideas of rabbits

falling without his hand. More likely,
he is smiling, as you are smiling,

when there is no one about. Perhaps the snow
has not fallen, and a fishy-mouthed dog

is wagging its tail in the gazebo, chasing
its rotten breath as it is tugged off by the wind.

Is the dog a people, too? Maybe to you,
as I think of you, as I always think of you,

injured in some small way, bruised on the ankle,
suffering a stringy hang-nail—miserably—

whining out of proportion to the pain.
You are unaware, meek and bland as you sit

by the window, breathing a white mask
around splayed fingers, pressing your face to it

as if, in the next life, you will flatten, stay flat,
slide where you will. Perhaps under the hooves

of the blue water buffalo.

GENIAL THOUGHTS ON A MISTY DAY

Water is an improbably popular beverage in the village.
Then, iced tea. A close third, who knows?
The census takers were in such a hurry,
they barely touched my biscuits.

In my hands, the fierce mouse
is tugging at my tail. It is not anxious.
Anxiety is expressed by like members
touching. Hands, for instance,

or if you're lucky, genitals.
If you are lonesome, this is how the hemispheres
of brain close in upon each other,
complicated mushrooms withering

without rain. I admit it. I adore water.
Iced tea is not bad, but it's just partly water.
If the census takers worked with their backs
like real men, they would have devoured

my excellent biscuits, banged against the outhouse door
begging me for more. More! You'll see.

GENERATION GAP, BUT NOT SO MUCH

I will not tell you how scared I am of nutmeg,
or of how future generation might have mouths
opening from their necks, neglecting heads at all.
But think about it. The lamprey

that you shrieked at on that ill-fated field trip
could be your grandson, only landlocked
and well-mannered. Forget playing catch with that kid!
Watch your head! It would be

very easy for the little tyke to digest your face
before you even noticed. Here he comes.
Grabbing your ears and pulling up,
his precocious secretions digesting your expression.

FRIENDS FOREVER, SMILING UNICORN?

I often think about the end of string.
If I am on the bus, I squeeze my fingers in my fingers
and make a wish. There's so much
breakfast left in me.

I wonder what the chickens are doing,
are they clucking in the straw,
thinking about the embryonic birds
I heated up that now
dissolve in the smelly acids in my belly?

If I laid eggs, I would not handle this so well.
What could I eat for breakfast? Who would tie my shoes?
Even if I got onto a crowded bus, how could I hold onto the rail
and my three quarters with my claws?

TICKLE THE KITTY

Penises are either perfect
or they're not. It's up to me.
There are lovely, frothy cappuccinos
under a cart's umbrella.

Hard to think when you are sipping,
harder to think if you yourself
have a mouth covered by a foreskin.
Like Ed.

Maybe Ed should have umbrellas
sticking straight out of his thick skull.
Maybe I could push him
through the park and hide from children

when the sleet comes, and chubby
girls in pigtails clamor around the cart
for shelter. Go home, girlies!
I am happy beneath the pink wings

of this perfect pink umbrella.
The rain falls. A pale pink circle
gyrates around my sneakers
as I scoot along the path.

CAUTIONARY NAPKINS

A box is like a box because the outside
is to have within it

anything. Some boxes are a kind of bird
        with metal wings that ate
the remnants from your plate

in extremely fine establishments like
        Bonanza.

Cigars, frozen crustaceans, sand and
Grandma all have boxes,

and earth is what a box is when
        it cries through space,

holding animals and mountains to its
        skin,

as it rushes from the burly sun.

THREE NOVELS THAT COULD HAVE BEEN BETTER

I.
LUMPY SOMETHING

Every day, something exciting doesn't happen to our protagonist, the
merry Henry Whistle. Between weenie roasts, there is always jubilation
and planning the next weenie roast.
Are we happy at the baptism, or are we hoping that the little sun of a gun
is going to bite the priest? I have a theory that it would be quite alright to
toss
the little bugger in the Winnebago and make him suck down that last
Brussels sprout
on the tremulous edge of this great nation of yours, mine, ours, make of it
what you like,
the bugs are taking over anyhows, and that is only the beginning of a
new
set of instances. The last instance for us, though, a page away, single
spaced,
is the stubby life of a stubby little fruit boy.

II.
GENTLE PLEASURES

A quiet street. A girl in something red,
a coat of steaks, the good stuff, sewn together at the bones
has nothing to say? She is needy for bicycles,
automobiles, tigers on skateboards,

with a gleam in her eye. Suddenly,
the singing of boys from Louisiana at the opening maw
of a Trailways bus—they are all plugged in
to the same station,

cheering and nodding their heads,
dropping sauce on their lapels. The gorgeous
thrum of bees sneaking through the air
as our heroine draws her hand

against her forehead, making plain
M & M's a reason for being, ignoring the nut kind.
The boys are smacking their lips, their lips! Smiling at screens
as Teensy Rita is lifted up into a yellowed sky.

III.
THICK ANKLES

A family waits in car
while woman shops,
buying nothing,

eventually becomes fascinated
by lobsters in tank,
and covers baby in them.

KNIFING CHUBBY

A special moment in my childhood occurred in chamois.
Not ethereal, exactly, but so soft!

I walked for days believing that I could polish silver
with the soft, greaseless edges of my fingers.

Soft, soft, soft!
I rolled. I rolled and cried. I bucked and wept,

and the homely Benjamin Franklin half dollar crawled
out from the sofas of middle-aged couples

and rolled toward me from all directions,
as if I was a kite of the most delicate beige silk!

THE UNUSUAL DAYDREAM

Hepb watched the atlas burning on the blacksmith’s bed.
Green Africa peeled off from Pink Asia,
and the world moved closer in, until the major ports
of Europe blackened, and smoldered on top
of the smaller cities underneath.
As Hepb ran,

the trees were busy dropping chestnuts on the stones
around the blacksmith’s barn. The old farmer
with his limping horse whistled, called out,
and turned angrily away, pulling
the leather strap taut. His fingers
smelled of wood-smoke,

and the horse’s mane singed,
curling back, back toward its flattened ears.
The edges of the sky, behind the trees, were darkening.
Hepb hurdled at the mangled goshawk
hanging from a wire outside a metal door.
The widow, gnawing feathers by the stream,
believed her breath had become this boy,
shivering with his burning fingers
batting at the wings.

THE PARABLE OF THE PEAR

A crowd surrounds the markings on a pear:
the thin, brown scars that calligraph its curve,
and what is written there astounds them all,
or almost all of them. A mob, more often unified,
may contain dissenters, like the man who smiles

and wets, watches how the pale, gray spotted indentation
where the stem juts fades off into green,
and like a painting of morning yellows on one side.
What should have been midnight is a flattened spot
of skin, a brown, a brown that never should have been.

A girl in need of combing cowers at the tassels of a biker,
suddenly timid in his chains, suddenly terrified and damp
beneath the eyes and full of half-speakable words,
none of which has much to do with pears or verbs.
Sell me, something says, make something terrible like me

a current, a wing span, the thoughts of a saint.
Steal me, steal me, murmur the watchers in the crowd,
not knowing that the voice they almost hear is all of them.
The world would crumble in the harvest of such crops,
would turn, uncertain at its core, and race apart

as a solitary man stands with his chin gleaming with juice,
as a stone that mocks its mountain from its hems.

NARCISSISTIC WOLVES

A wolf, tensed on its haunches,
howls a blizzard from its jowls.

His blue eyes chill the flies
that glitter and tussle

in the tangled, black and white
fringes of its mane. When

he was small, he'd prance
on soft black feet, and cheer

to smell the quarry that his father
brought, still twitching from his fangs.

First love, too, had the smell of meat
freshly killed, and the scent

that it purred to the air
was like a crimson wind

the desired mate gave off
as it was dipping its snout

into the stream
racing beneath a paper thin,

translucent skin of ice,
and then snapped its hand

around and clapped
its fangs down, out,

and gobbled it in.

PRETTY MOSQUITO

It cannot be much fun being a bug. To rely upon
uncertain mouths of flowers
for your welfare, and be known

for poking animals
three thousand times your size.
Relations at a picnic,

distracting you from food,
themselves! Grandmother:
shaking a white strand

from her hair, tying the rest
into a tight bow. You watch it
swim away, catching the light,

O constant exile:
        longing for blood, diving for places
        that will pester when you flee them.

LOVELY REMINISCENCES OF A PEOPLE PERSON

Terrible things have happened since Igor sold out.
It wasn't fair to us, we stood beside him through the freeze—
when there was no mention of him in the press, and then
when nothing that he did could cause an argument
we stood by, happy, exulting in his stints at Dead Laszlo's Place,
The Purple Pelican, the great fuchsia curtains of Nupar's,
stood and watched as our lives fell past, neglected, waved, and did not mar
his name. In fact, we looked unkindly at ourselves when spurned
by his advancing through the clubs, looked deep into the morass
of our childhood pain and found our fathers' lacking
and our mothers' cold. At night, we pulled our ankles
to our chests and signed old photographs, exulted
in the faded perfume of Igor's discarded scarves.
We could have warned him, yes, we should have,
but we did not want to meddle, we did not dare
to leave our residence outside his gilded door. We

always knew that that heart would find its flaws, the cracks
we hid: we'd dance, we'd piss ourselves to distract
attention from his brazen failings. We gave our souls, almost,
whatever he, in his violet livelihood and rubber accouterment
had lacked. Now, the moon grows old along the river's edge,
darting into weeds, where wild ducks stand in hundreds,
silently. Their feathers whirring in the acidic wind.
Once, the great remembered ducks had grand eggs to lay,
North and South were one beneath their brutal wings.
It frightens me to go out at night, to watch the babies
of my high-school days full of punctures, rolling bums for change

beneath MacDougall Bridge. But I go, I go because the wind,
despite its stench, carries clouds away over the mountaintops.
In photos of Igor, I catch glimpses of his niche—
tall buildings whose concrete bones are housed in sleek glass walls
without evidence of support, or darkened rooms of sheer
and scrubbed clean faces lighting their way through buzzing throngs.
There is a snapshot of him in which a family stands,
what appears to be a Chinese couple and their kids,
smiling wildly, waving, as the flashbulb burst. Igor,
oblivious to anyone, scratches his testicles,
and a little girl in her pink church dress grins desperately,
posing, opening her eyes, wide against the unkind light.

SLEEPY CHEESES

There, in the village, the clocks do the laundry.
It is easy for them, they have goat-herds inside them,
with painted hands that don't pucker in water.

Look to the mountain! Deep in the frozen
eyes of a farmer, old dreams are preserved:
the girl, who runs from the burning estuary

is covered with aphids and rides on the back
of a galloping chicken sidetracked from its quest
to peck through the glacier to thaw

the cold goat-herd. Or this one:
the moon rising over blue fields of night flowers
snapping at bumblebees, fat with their honey.

It is a good life, the buckets hang
from silver hooks above deep wishing wells,
the waters are sweet there, sweet

and rewarding. A little boy laughs,
drags his toy soldiers for days through
the petals while somewhere

the giant wheels slumber
in their great wooden castle: King Ya
and his courtesans, their minstrels

in shreds at their ends, the fragments
of lutes and flugel-horns scattered among them.
The mockingbird foretold that a young child

would travel and climb the steep steps
and dance on the tables
awaking the whey, and the daughters of whey.

SECRET FEELINGS

The most unpopular boy in the village was Chubby.
Ironists, as they were, the villagers called him

by this moniker because he was essentially skinny.
At first glance, it seemed that his knees

might be globular, but closer inspection
revealed them to be bony, and unpleasantly knobby.

“Look,” he said, “Laszlo, nobody likes me.”
Laszlo nodded anxiously, quick to agree.

“I think there are reasons for this. Can you help me?”
Laszlo looked at him, as he munched into a tart.

“Don’t you remember when you were a baby,
and watching the sheep in the valley for Joh-

ann? Every day, piercing screams would trail up the mountain,
bunnies, bunnies, bunnies! you cried.

You were shrieking the truth, boy,
but no one knows why.

BRISK BEGINNINGS

Frenzied aviary. Then, human voices, chastising, shouting, frayed.
I open my eyes, see the silver angles of the nautilus, feel my muscles twitch.
The basketball camp is nearly half-way done. Temporary boys on a temporary planet:
unclothed, gears in movement glancing apart—at one in focus—
arms and faces turned up in one movement as if that tensed ball was the sun

The sound I make is one the boy I was would never give: abandoned huff as I push
flat black palettes of iron up with my weak arms and watch them
not as one or one but many moving—glistening in the rippling of their temporary skins. Watch them jump! What pressure will it take for them, golden-skinned, these teak-wood skinned leapers to be turned to oil? I see their bodies, knotted in limestone,

flaking off, becoming bleached beneath a sun a great deal hotter than it was today,
the few of them who might have accidentally stepped off into a mire, but what is the chance
of that? They, like me, might only be a bit of meat a tree leaped from, blooming and blooming like shafts of flame out of the earth as flame bursts from the corona of the sun.
I can’t hold them here, I can’t hold myself to this, this body, or this pod of cells

the universe concludes in. Happy boys exulting in your bodies, do not change! But they will change, and change more quickly than their fingers tensing against the ball:
the wizened men who watch you beneath the exit sign, behind the lockers or the bathroom stall can tell you, but they don't recall themselves. They see
only you, the smooth skin, the arcing backs. What I see is not so smooth as that:

a plastic transistor radio, or the ghost of one, imprinted in a rock
like a fingerprint. What have we here? A child might say to its parent, walking
on the riverbank, the white fan of its fingers changing colors as it moves across the rocks,
black, then darker brown, then lichen green: a spider crawls across its forearms,
making two shadows, one without, and one within. I see this child running

through the garden, flashing red and blue, scrawling pictures of the ancient remnants
of the people recently found: the box-like fish with antennae, segmented and armor-like, but why? The huge concave beetles, giant forebear to the little ones
that crawl across the grass mat where they sleep beneath the noon day sun, too hot to walk
beneath. And these fat hominids, five-fingered, skins, in all evidence, incapable of changing,

so it is no wonder that they did not find their children leaping here, snatching
at the shadows of the wings, at the stingers and the hissing of the flapping ants.

DRIPPY BISCUITS

You know what I like? Lire, pesos,
wheel money: roll, roll, roll!

It would be heaven on earth
to have my organs in alabaster hippos.

To be heartfelt, an homage
to the afterlife and covered in foil

hammered from gold slabs
answers all questions! Here

are the regal feet,
and the fans swatting the dry air

pulled into purple by the sun
dying in the river, dredging the truth

from the bottom,
between crocodile toes.

CREAMY ONIONS

You are my truest love, fuzzy squirrel.
I pine for you, there in the rec. room, doing what you do.

I know our brains are different campers.
Our common interests are reduced to breathing,
eating, cracking nuts against our teeth.
We are fussy with our food. Why not love?

Thinking about freeze drying, I am at a loss.
Not so much for me, but what would you do
with all your time? How distracted you might be,
unzipping your freezer baggy, and then what?
Oh, there would be time spent training your delicate claws
the maneuvers necessary to boil water,
and depending on the bark, maybe lighting matches
and turning faucets. I will show you

how Lenny snaps the strike-all on his braces.
I know, I am playing favorites, mon chére,
fuzzy object of desire.

PIERCING SHRIEKS,
OR HERE COMES MR. GRUMPY!

Slow and steady

wins the race. Unfortunately,
sometimes bitter tasting beetles

do not need to move at all.
The tasty crickets hopping

forward are green and bright,
easily seen by hungry birds

with frantic beaks.

ON A FOOTBALL SATURDAY

In snow, I hear the river's rush—
and snow, tapping ice, the ice with water
quick beneath it, catching at the water, allowing escape,
incapable of catching it, it goes—

the river is what's left of what poured down continent from the pole,
the last of the great ocean, as it was, that was
the birth-salt water of these low plains
of North America, the great coral reef of Iowa,
the deep where the plesiosaur, where—
we have lost him again. Join me
in the wilderness, we turned

while he watched for us to turn, turn—
the hurrying crowd for the stadium, across from the hospital, losing us
and then, I see him, kick his cane away—

he shrugs, and laughs. I hand him over
to the attendant and I fall back, panting
with the children chattering about me, the beer cans
falling and crunching and the shimmying bright balloons--

1.
Monsieur Wu

I.
SLIPPER

At first, I saw he was afraid, and leaned into his body,
uncertain where the bottom was, how deep my eyes could see him.
I saw the sunset bleeding down, then saw my feet rise from him:
sunlight springing from blue snow—to understand where he might go.

*
There is nothing left. He spoke
and the three of us were one again. Moonlight found its silver feet
among the rusted doors, tinctured pink--clear air
and water mingling
corrode the strongest steel. Without metal
in between, air and water cannot destroy
one thing that does not break itself
because it will not bend. Fire,
what is free, is warmth
and dissolution then.

*
I am not there, there is only seeing.
Bodies, walking smoothly in mild air,
gliding blue car and red car growl,

passing peripheral bird-calls in three rotations,
like the pulling of a bird-sized
hand-pulled motor out of gas. I see

animals, oblivious to survival—
loosely clothed, one slides and turns,
arc of blue

against foil. The snow
snickering suspended over squares of gray,
curved stones and brown and branchless trees. I remember
his smooth arms, his tiny nipples,
brown eyes focussed on my eyes,

and being love.

*
He purrs, says always I was animal,
nuzzles his grateful head into my legs.
I was there. I saw his body in candlelight, remembered
his eyes in candlelight, guessed

how he might forage through sleep
and butt my shoulder, wake to grumble
“Go away.” Saw his face, wrinkling, drained of blood.
Perhaps he saw light falling through motes of plaster,
his body in the pockets of his eyes
as their boot-soles fell against him.
Perhaps he saw blue in purple within black
pulling at their roots, frail neurons, lift into the pyramids of dark,
where the hue and warp of light pulls back, apart, full windows
opening the black, and then behind it
black that is the singularity
of black, the improvident, the suck of everything—
or is it true that he knows how to stay me?

*

His body a thin darkness beneath the window—
inability to speak that requires action. Multiple drowning: faggot, family heir,
father, provider, hero, raconteur and rake,
baby having been formed in procreative gestures,
expected to mimic these. The guilt of nerve
retracing the maps: animals, tools
that their masters might make useful. Meaningless
emotion left us thirsty: reflections beautiful, despicable…
look how the pond draws dazzled petals into it.

*

I’ve lost my mouth. I’ve lost my hands!
Staring at the axis of the water and the sun inside the gape of this cup
where light dives out of itself and tears colors: red, indigo, and that yellow,
the yellow of the moon ragged on moth-wings,
laying stripes along my tongue between the tensed net of my fingers.

II.

THE KITCHEN

The hospital towel is hooked
through the rectangular crook of the Frigidaire’s handle--
a gray hummingbird against the white door
made beige by butter and nicotine.
Towels everywhere, brought here
from his various returns.

The wire strainer (hung on the hook
beside the brown gas stove)
casts an almost human shadow on the stucco wall—
meeting the handle at an angle
from the hook, a fluted mohawk,
and at the wall
the wire ridge one would place
on the pan edge, a priest’s collar
below a featureless face, or if one looks close enough,
a countenance of thousands of tiny white diamonds
outlined in brown.

THE MOST BEAUTIFUL BOY

Despite his problems
he looked glorious on a bicycle,
but one cannot wheel through life
straddling a bicycle.

MONSIEUR WU SPEAKS FOR THE FUR LOBBY

I was alpaca
before I was born.

If I look good,
who cares who stays warm?

AS HE BRUSHES HIS TONGUE,
MONSIEUR WU PONDERS MODERN POETRY

I am clearly the bunch monkey. Huh? The monkey,
you dimwit. Duh. What's this about bunch?
Bunch? What? Mother. Is that you? Honey,
don't eat with your mouthful. Are you really mommy?
Baby, I know, baby, but baby, we're just temps in the toothbrush factory
—

I'm here from the bureau. Let us see them badge.
Relieve me, we need you. Who are you kidding?
You. Mommy. What's the password, punk? Gumbo.
Quick—what dies? The president do. Personally,
not much. Where is the capitol? I TOLD you,

my pocket. Mama, what's with the big nose
and glasses? Who you calling clown?
This is Wu, sir.. Over. Roger. Mother,
you love me? Monsieur, who's Roger? Me, mother.

THE DOCTRINE OF MONSIEUR WU

I was learning to love what one needed to love:
everyone laughed. I slid down the elevator.

Look at them smoking, think of them fucking!
Glittering nose-rings and ear-rings and sandals
exposing their toe-rings!

But imagine them standing up straight, wearing fabrics
with surface integrity, imagine! Get out!

I think of mother. What was it she told me?

I'm worried, she said, that you kids will have
no spiritual center will join with some cult,
will have no appreciation for cliché. I hope
that it wasn't my fault when that happens.

Oh Mom.

I'm thinking that The Moonies are sitting,
nodding dazed at some sermon,
scratching their elbows
at some gang-bang wedding
after a long day of licking
stamps for that voice!
Be very careful.
Be very careful.

We all get sicker when we don't get
what we want. We all get sicker when
we don't get what we want.

MONSIEUR WU’S MATRIARCH

Monsieur Wu’s mother was not what she seemed.
Who was the father to Monsieur Wu? Somebody knew
in Milford County Prison. One night, in the dark
winter morning of love, the old man came to
beneath a great tree. The ghost of the father
perched in the boughs, giving hideous light.
“Have you seen my son?” someone asked, and the men
looked around. Someone asked the question again.

Then later, the old man pulled a knife from his pants
and held the blade flat at the side with his palm.
The cameras were hissing. Fags can use the word “hiss”—
it’s the sound that their breath makes when the shots miss.
On TV, there is nothing to do with him now:
Monsieur stares through the lenses. He turns the lights on.

MONSIEUR WU’S FAMILY ALBUM

He couldn’t hear, but what he saw was free.
Puzzled, arthritic monkeys drew with their feet—
and what they scratched with bits of ocher, nubs of dolomite
were dots, imprecise stippling, white and brown comets
on rocks cracked by sun. The mountains clanked with flurried beating
of paws, the ticking of nails on the granite floor, crumbling
of soft stone on harder stone. What he saw

were gliding things, specks of hawks suspended
over mossy groves, fires flickering at dusk, indistinct,
illuminating, not leaves, but the bellies of leaves
whose faces flashed green, or stars, when darkness cupped its lid
over the high peaks and the speckled lake. What was free
was mark and music then. Monsieur Wu, pegging

pebbles at those notes with a slingshot
might replicate, imprecisely, the echoing of stars or predatory birds
against the far edges of the valley,
against the knobbed ridges of his nuchal bun.

MONSIEUR WU IN THE SCHOOLYARD

Perceive Monsieur Wu
threatening the pigeons,
shooting the plump girls
from the swing-set
with his cap gun.
Look at him now,
as the blue wings

fan upward. He’s screaming,
chews skin from his elbow,
demanding of sandbox
the attention of shellfish.
Maybe tomorrow we’ll build him
a tree-house,

something high up,
away from appliances.
Why is he bent on
caressing the plugs?
If we give him away,
will they take the pigeons,
will they, like we,
regret he has thumbs?

MONSIEUR WU SWINGS

It is cold in the yard where Monsieur Wu plays.
The dark is a balustrade on which he leans,
smothered in honey, swarming with kings.
In the valleys of Egypt, the workmen pile sand
over the eyes of the Sphinx, and the smog
of Cairo falls down on its forehead, the wing
of a bird fooled unkindly from the wind.
Monsieur Wu stares at the bottle-caps, hoping

for him, for the face of a seraph to rise
from the ink-stamped-fun-prize: instantantananeous!
Just a bubble edged circle snowy with rust.
He jumps to a stand-still. The carrion crow
alone on the monkey-bars scratches its tits
with the saw of its beak. Monsieur understands this.

THE PEOPLE BECOME DISGRUNTLED WITH MONSIEUR WU

Monsieur hid a buffalo
under a hippopotamus.
They ate themselves.
He could have

given one to us.

MONSIEUR WU'S HOLIDAY

Monsieur Wu stood at the top of the mountain
picking off roosters
down in Joe's barnyard

with a rubber band slingshot—
hee hee, hees Monsieur Wu,
nobody knows why the eggs

are bankrupt.
Swee-Pea Meacham, swigging his whisky
pissed off of the school-bus,

waiting for the sound of the recess alarms.
He looked at the plum tree
and scratched his left ankle,

and dreamed of Monsieur Wu back in their boyhood
dipping hens into ink-pots
of various colors.

Monsieur Wu doesn't remember a thing.
He sang for the moon to come over the vista,
fondled the piles of stones he had left.

III.

MONSIEUR WU’S ORDER

Monsieur liked his tubers in a row.
For weeks he threw
his head at the train that made such noise!
He gardened beneath the great clown
whose mechanical nose turned eternally, blinking,
over the Burger Barn.
Monsieur trampled echinoderms
and bit off a harpy
from the arm of a merchant marine wading in,
set tracing paper on the screen, sat and drew
exactly what flashed there.

TOUGH LOVE

Twilight hid the tins
and sacks, hid the black spokes of the onions
in their scarlet net: Monsieur rolled his television set
through flour and corn-flakes
between his feet.
Tarzan,
swinging through blue jungles
sputtered and blinked, finally sizzling in blizzard.
Monsieur tapped the screen,

hung wrinkles from his forehead,
bent his fingers back. Looked west,
red light cut the bank of ash,
pierced the green copper greenhouses,

made the glass flash.
Nobody knows but Monsieur, no one can complain:
pigeons, scrambling for the crumbs
of stolen bread, splattering the clergy,

or boys in cherub frocks
wandering from packs of beggars to the hill
where one by one elms die
buzzing deaths to save themselves.

MONSIEUR WU ON DECK

Monsieur danced down deck, rubbed the maps
against his balls to please the seas. The pole-star
spun as Wu fell laughing to the wood. He climbed the mast
to pinch the parrot, hung his body in the stars
with arms wide open to the moon and leaned
into the love of gravity. Held the sea-star to his face
to be a face of blue arms without eyes. Blind, he waved farewell,
pulled the blowfish from his basket—

the fish squirming at his feet
leapt into the air.

MONSIEUR WU AS PREDATORY HAIR STYLIST

At the reading, beneath snores

of janitors, thin girls were braiding
row on row the hairs of girls in front of them.
Monsieur kicked the lectern,
spinned lids of soup-cans

toward the front row where they sat:
lethargic listeners, weeping at bouquets and geese,
Swack!!! The lids sliced air into the back wall
where the mayor sat,

laughing, ears red,
bare feet bumping.

MONSIEUR WU’S MOVE TO THE BIG CITY
IN AN EFFORT TO MAKE IT AS A FOOT MODEL

Lo, the hurried squirrels
race before me
chattering nervously deep in their nuts--

I could live very easily in the park, in a tree
if those selfish rodents
would make room for me.

MONSIEUR’S RETREAT

Monsieur showed Monsieur what was right—
pocketbooks and glass,
arms attached there by the straps,
window-washers pulling streaks of soapy water down,
drops and bedizened bubbles

popping on the wrists of ladies doling greenbacks
to Monsieur, leaning outside the matinee.

“Dress well, and the world
will slip you money
without sniffing,
comfortable that what is loved
sleeps safe in pockets of familiar fabric.

I’ve stared grit off these facades,
filled my hands with prayers and noble compromise—
still, there I am, swinging like a handsome monkey
from the top floors,
staring deep into my eyes as the matrons gasp.”

BOTANY

The plant-life of Tuva
is not without merit
Monsieur Wu, ever the polymath,
scrawled on his resume-

there’s big plants and small ones,
green ones and brown ones,
and they scare me, and stand there
taunting me with chlorophyll!

I know, he said, I know.
I’m no good. When the sun
hits my skin I can’t
make my own food.

THINGS WITH WINGS

The best birds in America are always clean,
fastidious, finical makers of eggs
exploding and speeding outward
from eggs
in verisimilitude of the expanse
of creation,
the spray of all galaxies
out from the center,
the exact center from which everything flew.

The worst birds are worse
than you might first imagine—
niggardly, quick to judge
singers without syntax,
pretenders to boobies, the Oryx,
the fierce, fossilized Dinwoody bird,
which the reader might wish to remember
as the worst of all birds,
as recounted by Monsieur Wu
in his bold treatise
The Breeding Perversions
Of Bad Birds in America.

The Dinwoody bird! Only one sighting,
by Monsieur himself—
two feet by three, almost square, stubby wings
and pink feathers, six-clawed talons

jointed at its genitals, hermaphroditic, one stripe
of brown on its blunt, dodo-like beak,
which, when last seen, was pecking the teats
of a marsupial peckerwood
who cooed a complaint
of the matter to her master,
Monsignor Monsieur Wu himself.
Hence its name, hence
the commencement of the study
of bad birds in America.

When asked to comment,
Monsieur's mother replied:
"There are worse things to do
though what is hard to imagine!
In the old country, anyway,
the birds are much better!
Clean birds! Bright birds
with so much potential!
My son, who's no peacock himself,
can't cut the mustard,
so how come he thinks he can boss around birds?"

MONSIEUR WU'S MUSE

In the textbook, the pictures of her were unkind:
the cross-section hemispheres weren't really minds,
so to speak: rudimentary traps. Monsieur Wu
ran after her. They were both hugged by bats
head to toe. Concrete poems torn from the books,
the proliferation of Monsieur Wus blurred into swarms
of blank stares, dirty looks, institutional forms

one can fill out forever with pen-knife or pen,
with finger-paints smeared on his fingers behind him.
"Oh mother!" he cries, "I have never been true."
He has cross-referenced Monsieur Wu with nary a sigh
that this was his body that carried his mind.
He opened his mouth to watch flames. They were blue.
His tongue revolved slowly. He watched what he said.

MONSIEUR WU'S AMERICA

I'm not as pleasant as you think I am.
This so called pigpen, your America, is not my chum.
Is it your friend, you think she's funny,
Mushmouth? I'm out for Christ, cool cat, and titmice everywhere
will be for him when we come through. Don't like
the bus? Can't ride this train? Can't find culture
on your agar face? Don't
cry to me. I smelled a yellowed book once
and it made me come. Your old man
dropped his wedding band inside my sink,

his ass puckered over cold linoleum
as he clinked around the drain for it
with a yanked-straight wire hanger.
I shouted out from bed, "Lock the door behind you
when you run." I yawned, shut my eyes
to love, where the corporate ladder starts.
My heart closed down. My swim bladder
is bloody in my other body, spiral in spiral in its tank,
the blinking neon diner sign bends green
around my gills. If these streets were mine
brother loving brother could run up
to one another in the streets, random acts
of hug. But this is your America.
You call the self-same deed assault.

MONSIEUR WU’S WORRY DOLL

If life is a Laundromat, cried Monsieur Wu,
I am static cling!

The ponds of the public park
riddled with microfiche.

IV.

MONSIEUR WU’S NEIGHBOR TO THE RIGHT

Milford lives a stone’s throw down the road.
He licks envelopes to make his bread. There’s a catch
to everything he says. We like to watch him
stealing eggs from Chloe
who wouldn’t squat on brown eggs anyway.

Monsieur rubbed his belly, chuckled, lit a stogy.
Rubbed his speedometer into Milford’s face.

MONSIEUR WU’S NEIGHBOR TO THE LEFT

The furnace in Monsieur’s basement’s crammed with money.
The frightful goatherd rapped on Monsieur’s door,

shivered as he entered, the stink of goat spit
hardly detectable in the house’s cold.

He noted: gnawed Samantha and the plaid coat
draped across its shoulders like a hunch.

He noted: crate dusty with old tabloids
and penny dreadfuls snug in Mylar pouches.

The front door swung open. Swee-Pea Meacham closed it.
The tinkling of the nanny’s copper bell

ignored as Monsieur hauled her on his shoulder
and skipped through Milford’s goat-pen toward the pond.

MONSIEUR WU HOLDS A TEASPOON OF RAINWATER IN HIS LEFT HAND

In the palm of his hand, a little bug sipped.
Monsieur clapped like a seal. He needed his space.
In the mirrors, he watched it untidy the lace
of the snow in the window over the town
where the dogs of the doctors were tugging the trees
toward his shadow. The dark smelled like meat,
the dark smelled like Monsieur Wu looking for clues.
When he danced, he could read the size of his shoes,

when he ate, he could watch the ice cream go soft.
The abstract expressionists hung him up on the left,
the kresh where the whispers and the purring of sleep
faded the splatters of what he was now.
O God, if I'm carried from him, give me breath.
It is not the fire which I promised I'd keep.

MONSIEUR WU’S SPACE EFFORT

What was I punching, you ask?
I was punching an astronaut,
beloved of Milford, the six county area.
How could I know the old boy, playing possum,
would take my endeavors
down on closed-circuit video?

Mother was outraged, of course,
as was Cousin Polly, who interrupted
her skeet-shooting escapade deep in the outback

to fly home to deride me.
I adore gaseous bodies, body suits, helmets.
If there were cherubs, they would really dig Milford,
love litigious Joey as they love themselves. I can’t begrudge either
for their numerous lawsuits,

what’s mine is theirs,
would could I visit it sometimes.

NUANCES ON A THEME BY GOFFIN/KING

Up on the roof: Monsieur Wu panting,
blowing on marshmallows
impaled on an ice-pick. Monsieur Wu never
got abducted by aliens. He sat on the roof,
in good weather and inclement,

wearing bright clothing. Young bucks
and anxious kneed fellers in Milford County,
the citizens blink in their buildings
squat lightning bugs, ready to screw in their light-bulb
America. The comet: red herring.

The great ships are landing
about him like cinders, snowflakes with engines.
Armies march up his finger, snort into their tubas.
Your people are puny! they shout from his fingerprint.
Where is our pudding? Monsieur Wu spits in his palm.
They take holiday, swimming there, laughing

at Velcro and Lycra,

their natural enemies,
purring on Monsieur Wu.

THE ASTRONOMER, MONSIEUR WU

“I am a planet!” boasts Monsieur Wu,
hugging the planetarium’s
colander sky.
The black holes of his hands
scrubbed the stars from the ceiling.

“I am the dot
from which creation exploded—
the whir of the galaxies
snaps in my filling!

The sun wasn’t so hot
when it cowered in me.
I passed the moon
like ammoniate stones.”

He ran from the room

to the great iron pillar,
lightning zipped to him
and made him awake.

“Oprah, O Oprah,
free me from destiny,
I realize earth
might have been

a bit off.”
He pulled the elastic
of his new tighties,
a swarm of hornets

buzzed free from his bags.
Monsieur Wu: slippery when wet!
“Nobody thanks me
once we have met.”

THE SEASONS OF MONSIEUR WU

I saw old Monsieur
in the crusty corn,

stand shadowless like Monsieur Wu
listening

to Monsieur Wu.
The snow fell like Monsieur

falling to earth,
like Monsieur falling

brightly away.
Monsieur was

icumen in. Monsieur Wu

and the living is EZ.

ISHMAEL AS MONSIEUR WU

Monsieur Wu. Monsieur Wu. Monsieur Wu. Sneeze
when you are ready, head out, come clean at the root
of the cyclad whose sperm is as fat as your head,

fat as your fat head you fat head Monsieur Wu.
Monsieur Wu I would have sleeped with you, wrestled,
squeezed aromatic globules of whale goop

naked as jaybirds in vats wholly supervised:
squeezing and squeezing the translucent pearly white
perfume from a whale’s fat head

with you, my bath-tub gefilte fish! I
would have fed you and given my self sponge baths,
I would have kept your skin moist

and your fat head from slipping under.
You told me the sponges were after me. You told me
the sponges were after me. They could not

be after me if I took shears to them, if I took
knives to them, sponges who knows what they are
with their snotty no spinal cord attitudes

and resilient absorbency. Ten million dots
are what all my sponges were. Ten million dots
that I squeezed through a sock. There,

in the bathtub beside you, ten million dots
fell into formation, became one big pink sponge
at the root of your business. Your business,

Monsieur Wu, your business! So here I was,
cleaning up after you and the sponges, ten million sponges
whispering plans as they slid down your spine.

V.

MONSIEUR WU VISITS THE LAND OF HIS ANCESTORS

Depends on which system.
Monsieur Wu waltzed down the alleyway, cats hooked to his ankles.
Deep in the bellies of villager's violins,
the beetles were ticking. Look at my fingers, he said,
are all of them trail-blazers?
Everyone polished their balustrades, sent in their ticket stubs,
worried for Monsieur Wu.

"Isn't it curious
that nobody pickets him?" "Isn't it fortunate
that he isn't fireproof?"

Schoolteachers lurked in the bushes,
squeezing erasers. The gods of the kitchen
squatted teapots, waiting for prayers: Give us a toaster!
Help me through dinner! Monsieur Wu snatched at the pleas
from a chimney, shoved them in his pockets.
Sent threats instead: love me, or else! Don't speak, or I'll bean you!
I have seen Monsieur Wu complaining to little ones, dissecting agendas
I could not divine. Next day, in the bank chubby puppets
dangled from chandeliers dribbling syrups on currencies.
Bloody kneed toddlers waddled through lollipops.
This is anarchy, Monsieur laughed,
admiring himself in the closed circuit monitors,
his chops swelling and shrinking as he waltzed at the lenses.
I am pouting, he said, as the high walls imploded.
He tickled the best of his toes. I am as babies are, King of Democracy,
hate everyone equally, don't pick up myself.

MONSIEUR WU IN LOVE

I love you, said Monsieur Wu,
lips stinging with Windex.

If your face was pulled inside out
you'd be perfect like me.

In spring, bees will sting me
to die on the honey

of Monsieur Wu's arms.
Milford is angry

he can't afford me.

He scratches my bar-code

affectionately.

MONSIEUR WU CHECKS IN

Who is this? Hisses Monsieur Wu.
Well-sir-ee, let me tell you, I got what I wanted,
my house in the country,

and love, Mr. Hateful.
So take your drunk angels and stick them in sideways
—it's four in the morning—

I've got love and a pony,
mustache men fiddling by ice sculptures of Nero,
that old musical question

“Lady of Spain.”
—bon voyage, Mr. Monsieur Wu, they should shoot you
with Ritalin—

take that, said Monsieur Wu,
and that to your grave.

May I hug you?

MONSIEUR WU DIALS 911

We have commenced the unholy project. Are you coming?
Creep mofo kiss me, cudya? Frenetic
kewpie, think about it, what is this?
Chubby naked baby with the wings brings things
to boil with a bow and arrow—boring.
I couldn’t teach these pipsqueaks no discipline,
what, a little archery? God save us. Who’s
us, Monsieur? That’s Monsieur Wu to you, puddinpop.

Uncle Wiggly was a wabbit. O wuzzee fuzzy?
Lookit, kiddo (levels the scoop). I need some closure.

Here he is, that’s Mr. Monsieur for you. Closed.
Why won’t you speak? Speak. Not loud. Louder.
Love is how we fall when we are ready to dissolve.
Plop. Plop. Fizz. Fizz. That was the Monsieur Wu that was.

NUANCES ON A THEME BY MERRILL

The poet took sugar in
his afternoon tea…I drank his bile,
Monsieur Wu, maestro of all I purvey!
If I go naked no one is hungry.
Bleeding fingers in the fields of cotton.

Can’t afford

Band-aids/
Glad to eat

Meat-loaf.

MONSIEUR WU WATCHES AFTERNOON TELEVISION

I’m the feel good flick of the summer, sighed Monsieur Wu.
Good for your bladder, EZ on eyes. He jumped from the ginkgo,

stank up to policemen, peeked into their bloomers,
shook them for change. Peek-a-boo Monsieur Wu,

for sale at Wal-Mart! Monsieur Wu lite
in your grocer’s freezer. Monsieur Wu sneezes.

The insane don’t know that they’re crazy, smiled
Monsieur Wu. I looked down toward my chin

to read Monsieur’s wristwatch.

VI.

MONSIEUR WU AS INVENTOR OF ICE MILK

Monsieur Wu lived in my basement, making bead curtains,
watching fairies like corn-flakes light on the furnace.
He puzzled why curtains might be a mistake.

Everyone loved different people
called Monsieur Wu. Monsieur the innocent! Monsieur Wu,

prep cook. Monsieur, incentive to salesmen, timid student of history,

Monsieur the dog and Titanic survivor!
Little orphan Monsieur Wu slipping into face,
Frances Farmer or Marilyn bruised under the eyelids.

The little boy dizzy on the bed, my sad Monsieur Wu.
Here he comes now, with his brown eyes buckling,
carrying the head of a man he might be in his arms,

yapping of Marx, and the plight of the Indian,
eyeing the blue silk of the shorts of the crew team,
staring and staring at a small child in white robes

limping and howling down the hill where he's buried,
that first Monsieur, the shy one,
winking at me over handcuffs.

MONSIEUR WU'S PICNIC

Monsieur Wu winked
at the picnicking neighbors,

scratched at his navel
and blew up their birdbath.

MONSIEUR WU AS SEX OBJECT

Chubby say: mullah makes for fluffy fun.
Ethereal and alienated, we are under Monsieur Wu
flattered. Acceptably, and if that’s what happened,
horny because of it. He’s the great walker
and we the gum-wrapper robbed, gunny-sack,
Walpurgisnacht turkey-wattle, plainly awful
but fun-loving for we have heard this, his call.

Chubby outmoded: bony boy-baby blown forward

for manhood was waiting, wiggling its wampeter.
Just nod and walk through it, lovey. Leak
like you mean it. Privately. The march without pomp:
circumstance. Are you happy here, Louie?
Louie? I'm Dewey. Tinkers to Evers
to Chance. Bony, who's Monsieur Wu? Evers, he's blown.

WHOOPIE WITH THE PRO

Aren't you happy yet? Where's my rifle at?

I see you moving from table to table
unwilling to pick up your share of the okra.

Remember your aunt? She planted it, too,

unwilling to rise through parched Arkansas soil,
she followed a blind man
doused him in blankets
whenever he rested in case he might nap.

But you never sleep.
Close your eyes and complain!
Ask to be put in the cellar and slapped on the hands,
broken mule...

But what was I saying? What was I thinking?
I laugh at the dogs humping in patches of snow—

you say I am hateful, then ask me for ice cream.
You’re lovely, why can’t I get pal from his holster?
Lift your leg from the mattress
and sound the signal: when were you leaving?

UMBRELLA

The umbrella was his only friend.
When things were wet, the umbrella arched its back
and slid its handle into his damp hands.
The ridges of the ivory were smooth,

like love, or if not love,
what love should be, shiny
but hidden underneath another's hand.
When life was dry, the umbrella pushed

up at the blinds, but saw the staring tabby
waiting out its image, and the umbrella blanched,
shivered like a fruit bat
in the corner by the lava lamp.

The umbrella stared out of the round knobs
of its spokes at chartreuse globes
breaking, floating up, collapsing down,
and grew afraid. His friend

had had another all this time,
and what his friend wanted was not what
the umbrella gave. There was no rain.
The brief glance of the sniveling cat

had been through whiskers dry with dust.
What is hungry waits to get inside,
will stare and stare across a feast
to the one forbidden pudding in its case.

The umbrella closed and fell against the floor.
Friend wiped his hands and pulled the window up.

THE FINCHES FOR MONSIEUR WU

Most of the wings in the cages were wet,
the cage half-immersed
in the oat barrel from Albany.
The finches tweet:

“Take care of yourself! Don’t succumb to your needs!”

If Monsieur was beaked, he would poke it inside
the squat jugs of cider, be a student of vinegar,
eventual master of droll abnegation.

Look at his friends, they are yawning
in agony, heard he had door prizes
after the raffle,
sat, dazed among coleus,
as he whimpered for birds.

He blinks, and says wonderful things to the ladies
snagging their buttons on pink and green leaves.

CHEESY ANECDOTE

The past of France is French, he said,
it borders the absurd!
Wears little frills around the boxes

of its pocked wrists,
holds cheese and wine
inside its ribs.

It is better here. Time has no clothes,
goes racing in the brightened woods,
on the flat, white plates of winter rivers.

Monsieur Wu skates on runners peeled
from rotten birch, pokes
generation of fuzzy brown bunnies
on the folded ears,
screams “Stay awake!”

A woman taking sips of air
inside her rented room
squeaks a window up,
hears the full moon breathe.

Monsieur’s wide eyes cast shadows
on the plains.

MONSIEUR WU IN THE TROPICS

Smoke rose from the tiki’s beak.
Monsieur burns, because his back is made of monkeys,

his blood swarms with a primate’s lore. He squawks and burns,
screeches and whistles at the spiders in the boughs,
admiring their handiwork, their frightful legs, the scholarly examination
of the bird plucked from the wind by what they’ve sewn.

The lucky tiki snaps its beak shut, Monsieur sings his campfire song,
admires the chalked bison illumined by Monsieur Wu.

STILL LIFE WITH MONSIEUR WU

The original apples in Eden

were lemons.

Monsieur Wu picked through the fruits
for a ripe one,

stared down a nickel
in the bowl's bottom,

he waved at himself
from gray Monticello,

ran to the fields
to filch Jefferson's girlfriends,

sneered at the reverse
of the president's face.

MONSIEUR WU AS DOGGY BAG

Monsieur Wu lives like a paper bag when he is kind:
empty of everything, his mind, or the fools
that he's taken in. Monsieur the Laundromat. Spin cycle.
Spin. Unusual animal frisky in coats,
underneath Monsieur Wu, rushing for moats,
aiming for rivers: the shores west of him
pulling the sun down, you can smell the fish swim,
you can take little bits of him home in a bag—

this Monsieur the leftovers, encased in a swan
crinkled from tinfoil. Cheap aluminum now.
How we forget when there is too much to recall:
cotillions, abrasions, the weddings, the life.
Monsieur pushes fat angels from the tip of his knife,
and screams for the feathers to applaud as they fall.

Monsieur Wu sat in his bathtub,
kissing his radio.

This is retarded, he said,
as he drowned it.

In his sizzling heart
a silver slug tarnished,

back from the days
of pie eating contests

when wee Monsieur Wu
bit off the knuckles

of rotund Swee-Pea Meacham,
pie-eating adjudicator.

Serene Monsieur Wu is
tormented by

his genetic structure,
how he could bud better!

Braiding his helix,
fondling his crystals,

prehensile and webbed,
a percentage of everyone’s income

will carpet his way,
lief lief lief to Monsieur Wu!!!

MONSIEUR WU AS ADVERT

It’s not fair, it’s not fair,
screamed laxatived Monsieur Wu,

bacteria don’t have to date
to make more of them,

put me in albumin
and nothing happens!

O to have valleys
teeming with Monsieur Wus,

Monsieur Wu’s spreading on water,
oil-spills of Monsieur Wu!

He pushed on the horn
with the nub of his coccyx,

flashing his hazards
as he complained,

giggled and brushed
the bathtub with his bristles,

stared up at the faucet
as he spun down the drain.

ROBINSON, HENRY, HENRI, MAXIMUS?
--NO. BARNEY, HOMER, ELMO & TED

He watched the business suits
wiping Styrofoam cups

on their sleek trousers.
Hey suits, he shouts,

come to mama!
Monsieur Wu shook on the corner,

wept, contemplated.
He had implanted

the knees of his enemies
with vibrating micro-chips

specifically programmed
to disrupt

their morality.
They shuffled around him

like lint at a filter.
What is the password?

Monsieur Wu prodded them.
Two shook their heads.

One wagged his tail.
The fourth one grabbed

Monsieur Wu’s ears
and he kissed him.

Complaint, he said,
licking the angles

off Monsieur Wu’s mouth.

MONSIEUR WU’S PLOT AGAINST THE POSSE

He climbed into the nozzle and dozed
until officers signed on and squirted him
(the fools!) into their engines. Keys slipped in.

The engines trembled, and sputtered foam
of Monsieur through the gears. At last! He cried,
sizzling on carburetors, and lit a match against his enemies.

Badges sparkled down on Milfordtown like flakes of Joe.

MONSIEUR WU RESPONDS TO CUTS IN THE NEA BUDGET

Freedom of speech
for gas station attendants!!!

howled gassy Monsieur Wu
manning the pumps.

I am a
butt-fucking homo!

Buttfucking homo!
Buttfucking homo!

Buttbilliard hobo!
Oh

lookit a butterfly
flying by.

THE MONSIEUR WU THAT DARE NOT SPEAK ITS NAME

Monsieur Wu folded his hands to follow the butterfly.
Pistol-whipped logarithmically, lip-locked—
he gots his cootie-shots, sucker.
Lunch is a landmark for the hankie-pankers
making munch-bucket, hopping for hip-wiggle—
what? He needs none of that, tiger-puss.
You are who? Whom. Puppy-fucker.
Holy. Kosher. None of these. Ipecac.

Iodine. Stained the wigwam. Killed Crappy
and the Backsliders with a bathtub. Pipsqueaks.
Lumpy and Lefty. The prick-lickers bicker
with chickens. What we got's breakfast, boss.
We are flying at altitudes unheard of, homes
is the ground under which we wield our wings.

MONSIEUR WU AND HIS THEORY OF SYMPATHETIC INTERCOURSE

Given the symptoms,
he ran with them eastward,

watching for spots
where no spots used to be.

Poor me, sighs Monsieur Wu,
collector of spigots,

did that captured specimen
come into me?

MONSIEUR WU KIDNAPS THE VON TRAPP FAMILY FROM THEIR BURNT RESORT

Ouch. Ouch. Ouch. Ouch. Ouch. Ouch. Ouch. Ouch. Ouch. Ouch.

MONSIEUR WU AS THWARTED MESSIAH

Monsieur Wu stood on the mountaintop,
playing his piccolo.

The rats of the village
creeped up

to his toe.
“Look at the mountain-goats,

they all got problems
but they sound

bon vivant Monsieur
nibbling my garbage!”

OXEN FREE

The stains on these pantaloons used to be grass-happy
and folded over the chair. They play their low moaning
songs for the ghosts of my legs. Sigh
for them, Bubeleh and Beelzebub, sigh. Look to the eyes
for the sounds you will make, let that save you.
What's the diff, crickets? I'm the scout manatee
making the rounds north of Cuba for Mexico,
stinking through mud. Who are we? Monsieur Wu

and this certain person asking that Monsieur Wu
the only exceptions to: are there no stupid questions?
Am I wasting my time here? How's Fargo, remember?
Not so, Hidalgo, forget, but why worry.
Are you listening to Monsieur Wu? Is this Monsieur Wu?
Monsieur Wu who? Here we are. Are we? Hmmmph.

MONSIEUR WU’S WIDOWER

Before Monsieur Wu left, the mailbox was busy
with passports and mash notes, summonses and bombs
flying there, gold or what gold’s ghost would be:
now, one could store film there awaiting its bath.

I tap on the address, sniff the faint mint
from the fabulous stamps of my neighbor’s plump envelopes.

O! To be young and unstable again!

THE YELLOW CADILLAC

Monsieur Wu meant well. Took me to the hospital,
pinned on the map marked: things that bothered me.

I heard flakes of popcorn dropping into my pancreas,
admired the stink of his hand-held cigar. Was there someone

routing through litter for sticky aluminum,
was that beast I saw darting under

the wheels of my gurney his sickly shadow
bounced off trotting nurses? The surgeon touches

the hem of his garment, stares into his stethoscope,
blows himself a kiss. My pancreas hurts. Well,

don’t play with your pancreas.

VII.

AUTUMN SEEN FROM MAGNETIC NORTH

Fool's gold: there is nothing astonishing about autumn,
being predictable. The scarlet fists of hummingbirds
sucking at the necks of hyacinths are merely trees
aging in their year. Weary children with their satchels

crammed with picture books and furtive cigarettes
drowse beneath leaves that run, mesmerizing eyes
their heavy eyes must follow, weighted down
with wood-smoke, sod and ripened fruit. When rain

eradicates the paw-prints from the ashen sidewalks,
clouds' bellies brush the last, high gust of summer.
Love, it is the improbable that exhilarates
the jaded ear, the sanctioned eye: lackluster

fucks, complicated diadems of foliage
are to be had precisely for their undemanding divertissement.
See? White horses prodding apples over sun-blanched turf
whinny, ignoring the catastrophe crescendos are.

You lean forward, smirking at their sniffing,
hands clasped on the toucan's head, pressing your cane
into the hay. I pray for your gray hair, your breath
on my neck, for your age to heal the bones

you threw. When, whatever called you
limping from my voice, has left you humming
as you circle me with arms that you will lend,
and then pull away, common garbage

in a season's falling refuse. Brown-eyes,
walk through them, jettisoned leaves thick as pencil shavings
clumped like a shadow's day circle
frozen at a sycamore's first roots. You watch,

insentient mirrors of you, who would jerk
from the pageant of everything dying—but you cannot bear
surviving, which entails telling creation everything,
and by this admission, becoming ready.

HOSTAGE

The officers looked sideways, to be stern.
In the half-light, I loved you without anger
as you punched my knees, slurred your efforts
to humiliate. When I laughed, you laughed back,

leaned against the rug, your stubby hands
brushing the edges of first one tumbler,
then another, green and cerulean.
I did not want to touch your thighs,

or to touch the perfect fur plates of your chest,
or bend my mouth in pity toward you.
Pity dried up in me when I was seventeen—
for others, only. Closest friend, standing back

as my voice rattled into words so commonplace
in mouths that weren't my own. The punched shoulder
or the quiet listener to other's loves
was my first lesson in affection. I want

to close my eyes in dark at you.
My body aches against the fan's whir
and the blankets for your furry gut. Loving me,
too, I know you'll yowl my name out as they pass.

MONSIEUR WU

Monsieur Wu was younger than his face,
made me beg him not to leave. We held
each other in the long red fingers of the sunset
by the sleeves. He dangled me,

and the ground gave way beneath him.
My half-hearted Monsieur shrugged against my fall.
I can’t be sure now where his body is,
whether without the barter of his life

he slipped his wrists across a razor,
or lay down with his savior in the body
of a wife. More likely, he is drinking
in a tavern, flirting at old men’s watches

as they hope that he is what their bodies missed,
that random, anxious years will polish over him. His hands:
turned upwards. And he sees—what? I tried so long
to understand that body haggled over.

Someone will buy his bed, pay to have
the argument for living sharpened on their throats.
If I had never been there on the mountain,
holding thunder to my lips, I might be sifting

through the pennies with him now.
We danced, all of us, danced around him
and we prayed. And Monsieur Wu, the Lord
of Monsieur Wu, and nothing, did not go mad. He stayed.

THE PROPOSAL

I went to buy shoes. I needed shoes. With a twenty
in my wallet, my eyes ricocheting
on the bounty of the rain-cleaned town
high above the river—there is nothing better

than new socks, crew-length, in shoes
still smelling of glue and leather—where I stood
a year ago, trading my body for his body on the bridge.
I wasn't sure if he spoke at ghosts,

or if she was scolding him from dark water:
I was thinking on my feet. I was in love
with saving: a burning man can tear
the twisted metal of a car's hull apart to save his wife

or lover. I think about a detour but decide:
enough. The weather's warm, a few branches of bronzed leaves
enough to hold me back. What is it that I fear?
I don't want to drown. I don't hear

a frenzied chatter in the water, in the wind—
god, there it is—the place. The rusted railing,
the brick power-building to the left, water whose color
I could not tell you, moving slower

than it should. I would watch one leaf, yellow,
its edges curling down, a flimsy aphid,
drifting slowly toward the edge, where water
seems absolutely still, then bursts up and over

in a hundred arcs of brown, green, white
and clear, the opposite of color—then transforms
into spray, then foam, edging around nothing
but itself where the river starts again—but I

can’t see that from this angle. There is
the speeding up, a roar, and then the river
hardly moving. And there’s the leaf—
its tiny jaundiced body, passive, gathering speed.